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ABSTRACT

Zions First National Bank in Utah adopted a local school in Garrison with a student body of 11, and invited them to participate in their Christmas tree program and a field trip to Salt Lake City. The venture proved so popular and rewarding for the children and bank staff that more field trips were funded and later, when the school burned down, the bank donated money, books, a television and video cassette equipment. The bank has obtained names of four additional small rural schools to sponsor as a result of the success of this program and the positive relationships fostered. (JW)

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SCHOOL ADOPTION PROGRAM

Approximately five years ago Mr. and Mrs. Roy Simmons, Chairman of the Board of Zions First National Bank, were in the little town of Delta, Utah. They had stopped at a cheese factory and noticed a young woman with eleven children coming into the building. They were so taken by the appearance and good manners of the children they they asked the woman what group it was. She explained that it was the entire student body of the Garrison School. Garrison is located about 96 miles from Delta, which is the closest town to Garrison.

Mr. Simmons visited with the children for a few minutes. When he got back to the bank, he called in the Public Relations Vice President, Doris Taggart, and told her how impressed he had been with these young people. He smiled and said, "I wish I could adopt all of them."

That was the beginning of the "Adopt a School Program."

Mrs. Taggart contacted the teacher of the Garrison School and told her the bank would like to adopt the school. The school children were invited to participate in the Christmas Tree Program. They would make ornaments and decorate a tree at their own school, take a picture of the students with their tree and forward it to Mrs. Taggart at the bank. In turn, she mailed them a check for their ornaments, plus enough money to have a lights-on party and to invite the townspeople of Garrison to participate.

At the time of the original call to the teacher, Mrs. Taggart explained that the bank would like to invite them to be guests for a field trip to Salt Lake City. The bank would pay all expenses. This gave the children something to anticipate through the school year. Correspondence was exchanged, there were telephone calls, and before the field trip took place, a friendship had been established.

Considerable thought was given to what would be beneficial and entertaining for the children. Housing the students in hotels and motels without supervision was a matter of concern, since the bank was to be the host. Consequently, Mr. Simmons and Mrs. Taggart decided to entertain them in their own homes, which has proven to be the most beneficial aspect of the whole trip. It gave the hosts a real opportunity to become acquainted with the students, the teacher and the chaperons. Because there were only eleven students the first year, Mr. Simmons kept the boys and men at his home; Mrs. Taggart kept the girls and women at her home.

For entertainment, the students were taken through the bank, given lunch at the bank cafeteria; they visited the Hansen Planetarium, Hogle Zoo, and the State Capitol. They took a trip to Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake, and went to Lagoon (an entertainment park). They had

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supper two nights at the homes where they were staying. There developed a warm comradery and a family feeling.

Garrison School goes from kindergarten to the Seventh Grade. There was one girl in the Seventh Grade who was graduating that year and would be moving to Delta where she would board for the next school year. A party and graduation ceremony were planned for her. Mrs. Taggart was invited to go to Garrison (a distance of about 270 miles from Salt Lake City) to be the graduation speaker. Shortly before the graduation took place, the one-room schoolhouse burned down and everything was lost. When the employees of the bank heard about the disaster, they took up a collection of money and books. Approximately 800 books were sent to the school to help replace the library. Over $1,000 in cash was donated by employees of the bank. The superintendant suggested a gift rather than cash be sent to the school. A color television and a video cassette were purchased. The store where the items were purchased donated a case of blank tapes, upon learning how the gifts were to be used. When Mrs. Taggart presented the gifts to the school before the graduation exercises, there was not a dry eye in the audience.

Mrs. Taggart was invited to spend the night at the home of one of the families. The next day she found two baby rabbits boxed and in her car to take back to Salt Lake City for her grandchildren. This was a very warm and special occasion for everyone involved.

After the trip, a special "News Teller" was sent to all of the bank employees describing the event, which gave the employees an opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the program.

Since this first experience was so rewarding, the State Board of Education was contacted and the names of four additional small rural schools were obtained. The second year, the bank invited the students from Grouse Creek. There were 29 students and 6 chaperons. The students ranged from kindergarten through high school. Because of the number of students, four officers of the bank acted as hosts and each has expressed a desire to do it again.

The third year the bank invited the students of Antimony, a small community in the southeast part of the state. The Antimony School goes from kindergarten through the third grade. Although they were very small children, the townspeople were so excited about the trip that everyone in town volunteered to act as chaperon. Finally, the name of every adult in Antimony was put in a hat and a drawing was held. It was interesting that the head of the PTA and the mayor of Antimony were two of the winners and came as chaperons. This offered a real opportunity to discuss rural problems and the advantages of rural life.

We have another school in mind for the coming year. It is the Ibapah School on the Goshute Indian Reservation. There are eleven Indian children in this school who will be our guests in the spring of 1984.

The expense of these field trips has varied from about $500 to $1,000, depending upon the size of the group. We feel that the good will created between our organization and the people in these small communities has made this some of the most profitable money the bank has ever spent. We find these children have relatives in many of the metropolitan areas of the state. All have heard about this wonderful experience the children have had. A great deal of good will has been created for our company.

This program was not started as a public relations program for the bank. In all seriousness, it was started because of our interest in the young people in the rural areas.

The Garrison School children were taken to visit a local elementary school, the newest in the city, having all of the latest teaching equipment. The children were frightened and nervous about going there. Each child went to a class of his corresponding age group. Then we all joined the student body for lunch at the school cafeteria. When it was time to get on the bus, there were tears in the eyes of the Salt Lake and the Garrison students. They had all made a "best friend" during those few hours. It was interesting to us when we questioned the children that night about which school they would rather attend. The unanimous vote was to attend Garrison School.

After a school has participated with us in a field trip, the school is invited to participate each year in our Christmas Tree Program. They keep in touch with us, sending pictures, cards and letters at Christmas time, making us feel that we are truly a family.

Each year we find something new to help these students, and we hope to be able to continue this program for many years to come.